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Executive Registry

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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL 1995

Mr. Roger C. Horne, Acting Regional Director
National Capital Region
National Park Service
1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20242

Dear Mr. Horne:

Thank you very much for your most thoughtful letter of 29 November explaining the position of the National Park Service with regard to safety measures along the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

Your most careful consideration of, and your cooperation in, this matter are greatly appreciated. If at any time the Agency can be of any assistance to the Park Service in this or other areas of mutual interest, I hope that you will let me know.

Sincerely,

L. K. White
Deputy Director
(Support)

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IN REPLY REFER TO:
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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION
1100 OHIO DRIVE, S. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20542

NOV 29 1963

Mr. L. K. White
Deputy Director (Support)
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D. C. 20505

Dear Mr. White:

Your letter of October 17 to Director Wirth of the National Park Service, containing several suggestions for alleviating unsafe conditions or practices on the George Washington Memorial Parkway, has been referred to this Office for reply.

In view of the intense interest in which public safety is held by the National Park Service, your letter was brought to the attention of the appropriate members of the staff of the National Capital Region with a request that a careful study be made of each suggestion contained therein.

It is definitely believed that the posting of signs at your gates, warning your employees of possible snow or icy conditions on the Parkway and cautioning them to adjust their driving speeds to existing conditions, would have a very beneficial effect.

For this Office, however, to arbitrarily reduce the existing speed limit on the Parkway to 35 miles per hour during the winter months would, it is felt, impose unjustifiable restrictions on the using public and still fail to achieve the desired results. This conclusion is based on the fact that during the greater portion of the winter the roadway is free from either snow or ice, and during other short periods of time conditions may be such that a reduced speed of even 35 miles per hour may be too great for those conditions.

It is also felt that for this Office to attempt to establish fluctuating speed limits of 35 and 50 miles per hour on the Parkway, depending on road conditions during the winter months, would be highly impracticable. It is believed that this procedure would not only impose a responsibility on personnel of this Office, which should be borne by the motorists, but it could also result in tort actions against the Government for alleged error in judgment on the part of the employee or employees assigned the responsibility of determining the safe driving speed for all sections of the Parkway. The proper exercising of this judgment would be complicated

by the fact that, as stated above, a speed of 35 miles per hour may exceed the safe operating speed on the Parkway for short periods of time. In addition, during adverse driving conditions, seldom would a uniform reduced safe driving speed be applicable to all sections of the Parkway at the same time. Consideration must also be given to the fact that, as you are well aware, the safe driving speed upon a roadway varies not only with the condition of the roadway surface but with traffic conditions, equipment on the individual vehicles such as tire chains, snow tires, etc., and many other factors.

After due consideration of your suggestion that reduced speed limits be posted on the Parkway during the winter months or during adverse driving conditions, it is our feeling that, while we shall continue to make every effort to maintain the Parkway to the best of our ability, we cannot, nor should we, attempt to assume those responsibilities which rightfully belong to the motorists using the facility. This conclusion is supported in both the Motor Vehicle Laws for the State of Virginia and the traffic regulations within areas administered by this Service, as published in Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

Paragraph (h), section 46.1-190, article 3, of the Motor Vehicle Laws of Virginia provides that:

A person shall be guilty of reckless driving who shall:

(h) Exceed a reasonable speed under the circumstances and traffic conditions existing at the time regardless of any posted speed limit;

The traffic regulation referred to above, which is published in section 3.32(a), part 3, chapter 1, Title 36 CFR, provides that:

Sec. 3.32 Reckless driving; prohibition operations.

Persons operating motor vehicles within areas covered by this part shall drive in a safe manner. The following are prohibited:

(a) Driving carelessly and heedlessly in willful or wanton disregard of the rights or safety of others, or without due caution and circumspection and at a speed or in a manner so as to endanger or be likely to endanger any person or property.

It is believed that adherence to the above-quoted traffic regulations by the motorist on the Parkway will achieve the desired results.

Your expression of concern regarding the hazards created by motor vehicle operators who habitually disregard posted speed limits (or safe driving speeds under adverse driving conditions) is definitely shared by me. Your

suggestion that the Parkway receive additional police patrolling during the morning and evening rush periods has been referred to the U. S. Park Police. In this regard, we have been assured that special attention will be given to patrolling and the use of radar equipment.

The mowing of grass areas and performance of other maintenance operations along the George Washington Memorial Parkway, and other parkways under the jurisdiction of this Region, has always presented very serious safety problems to this organization. If it were possible, as you suggest, that this work be performed during the middle of the day or between rush traffic periods, our problems would be lessened to a great extent.

It must be pointed out, however, that, including the George Washington Memorial Parkway, this Region has the responsibility of maintaining approximately 79 miles of parkway road surface, most of which is of divided highway design and therefore equivalent to double the mileage. In addition to the parkway road surfaces, we have approximately 78 miles of other primary road and street surfaces to maintain.

In addition to the road maintenance operations, we have approximately 2,065 acres of grass areas along the parkways that require mowing. Grass areas to be mowed, in addition to the parkways, consist of approximately 2,160 acres.

While we could not possibly perform the required work in the above-mentioned areas if we confined our activities to between the morning and evening rush traffic periods, we do have some of the crews reporting to work at 6:30 and 7 a.m. This procedure reduces the amount of equipment using the roadways during the peak morning rush traffic period and allows the employees to complete their day's work prior to the evening rush period.

While, for reasons as set forth above, we are unable to comply with all of the suggestions contained in your letter, please be assured that your interest in the safety of your employees and the general public is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Acting Regional Director